Boasting a population of more than 200 million, Pakistan is the sixth most populated country of the world. With 55 million people living below the poverty line, it is not surprising that most live hand-to-mouth, are illiterate, and lack basic amenities of water, electricity and a proper roof over their heads. The disparity between the haves and have-nots is so immense that, while the majority are poor, and a large number unemployed, one per cent of the population live in palatial bungalows, own at least three cars, and have a posse of domestic help at their disposal.

The country has produced many highly talented architects who have created a number of award-winning buildings catering to this rich one per cent of the population. Yasmeen Lari – Pakistan’s first female architect – established her name by designing landmarks that still stand out for their architectural elegance. These include the Finance and Trade Centre in Karachi (1983-89), developed in consultation with the Canadian architect Eva Vecsei, and Pakistan State Oil House (1985-91), designed with sleek, reflective glass exemplifying a mighty Fortune 500 corporation.

However, in 2005, when an earthquake of 7.8 magnitude on the Richter scale hit the Northern Areas of Pakistan killing 80,000 people and leaving 400,000 families displaced, Lari’s life and work changed forever. Having formally retired in 2000 and become UNESCO’s national adviser for...